

STOREHOUSE OF MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

By Richard Montague

1. On a knoll in the grounds of the National Institutes of
2. Health, ten kilometers from downtown Washington, men and
3. machines are building a new home for a century-old treasure
4. house. A handsome five-story structure faced with white
5. limestone, it will shelter the National Library of Medicine,
6. which serves doctors and medical technicians all over the
7. world.

8. Founded in 1836, the library is a clearing house for medical
9. information printed in thirty-two languages. On an average
10. day it fills more than 300 requests from medical libraries in
11. the United States and other lands. It also receives and
12. catalogues hundreds of articles and books -- many of them written
13. by foreign doctors. This continuous accumulation of new
14. material has resulted in a collection of medical literature
15. which has been described by British Museum authorities as the
16. greatest in existence.

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1. The collection now comprises more than 1,000,000 books,
2. monographs, theses, pamphlets, microfilms, pictures, and
3. other informative material dealing with medicine. At the
4. outset it consisted of 200 books acquired by the first chief
5. of the U. S. Army's Medical Department. For the library began
6. as an army adjunct and remained so until 1956 when it became
7. part of the U. S. Public Health Service.

8. Most of the collection is now squeezed into a red brick
9. building near the Washington Monument, but this ancient
10. structure can't hold it all. Some of the overflow of
11. about 35,000 other volumes, dealing
12. with medicine in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth
13. centuries, is lodged in a branch library in Cleveland, Ohio.

14. Dr. Frank Rogers, director of the library, tries to obtain one
15. copy of everything significant printed about medicine anywhere
16. in the world. To this end the national institution conducts
17. numerous exchanges of its own and U. S. Public Health publica-
18. tions in return for other medical literature. Some of these
19. exchanges are with the 600 libraries in American medical
20. schools, hospitals, pharmaceutical houses, medical societies,
21. and industrial firms. Some are with medical libraries in
22. other countries. For example, the library now has exchange
23. arrangements with about thirty libraries in the Soviet Union
24. including the State Central Medical Library in Moscow and the
25. Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in Leningrad.
26.

1. Another development which was furthered Dr. Rogers' plans was
2. the signing in January, 1958, of the agreement between the
3. United States and the Soviet Union on exchanges in the
4. cultural, technical, and educational fields,^{an} agreement which
5. has since been extended. As a result, the library in
6. Washington is supplying thirty-four commercially-published
7. American medical publications to the State Central Medical
8. Library in Moscow in return for Soviet periodicals of
9. comparable value.

10. The national library's two main publications are its monthly
11. Index Medicus and its annual Catalog. The Index annually lists
12. more than 100,000 articles from all over the world. The monthly
13. output is cumulated at the end of each year by the American
14. Medical Association, a privately-supported organization of
15. physicians.

16. The Catalog lists books, pamphlets, and other materials, both
17. domestic and foreign. It contains about 35,000 entries.

18. Dr. Rogers and his aides also put out several other publica-
19. tions. When a subject is found to be especially popular, a special
20. bibliography is prepared. In 1958 the library published a ninety-
21. page Guide to Russian Medical Literature which lists works by
22. Soviet doctors and tells how they may best be obtained. More
23. recently it has published bibliographies on space medicine,
24. psychopharmacology, cancer chemotherapy, and fungus infections,
25. and a reference guide to documentary motion pictures on medicine

1. and allied sciences.

2. The indexes, catalogues, and guides it puts out inspire many
3. of the inquiries the library receives, for they show other
4. medical libraries what books and articles are available on
5. what subjects. The institution deals mainly with other
6. libraries, although individual researchers may use its stacks and
7. study tables. If a physician wants late information on the
8. incidence of leukemia in adults, for example, he seeks it
9. first at his local medical library. If the local library can't
10. help him, it forwards his request to the national library.

11. Normally the national library sends microfilm or photoprint
12. copies of the material requested, though original works are some-
13. times loaned. A photoduplicating machine

14. makes microfilm pictures of two book pages simultaneously,
15. and another machine enlarges the pictures and transfers them to
16. a paper strip which is cut into convenient sizes for mailing.

17. The library ^{reproduces} more than 3,000,000 of these pages
18. every year. Half are sent out in response to requests; the other
18a. half are kept to replace deteriorating pages.

19. The library also receives hundreds of requests each year for
20. reproductions of pictures and portraits concerned with medicine.
21. Its art collection includes some 60,000 items including original
22. woodcuts, etchings, engravings, and oil paintings. Some
23. pictures show the development of medical science down the
24. centuries. About 30,000 are portraits of medicine's great
25. men and women, including all the Nobel Prize winners to date in
26. medicine and physiology. The picture collection is growing at

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1. the rate of 2,000 items annually and is much used by news-
2. papers, magazines, book publishing houses, and artists.

3. That many physicians do not take themselves too seriously
4. is indicated by a large and popular collection of medical carica-
5. tures, both in color and black and white, by such artists as
6. Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Hogarth, and Daumier. There also
7. is a big stock of lantern slides, maps, posters, and hospital
8. plans and sketches.

9. One of the never-finished jobs in the library is the repair and
10. preservation of books and magazines whose paper is crumbling with
11. age. Many old books are rebound each year, and yellowing
12. journals are routinely microfilmed and -- if especially useful --
13. reproduced on rag paper and bound. Another quiet project is
14. the microfilming of medical school theses, of which the
15. institution has 280,000 from many parts of the world. As an
16. experiment to gauge the demand for such documents, library workers
17. are microfilming 15,600 theses -- comprising 515,000 pages --
18. acquired from the University of Berlin.

19. Machines do much of the library drudgery. One device
20. photographs 230 catalogue cards a minute for inclusion in the
21. Index Medicus. And the machine which transfers enlarged micro-
22. film pictures of book pages to a paper strip turns out six
23. meters of such pictures a minute. But automation will not
24. completely take over the routine work until somebody invents
25. machines which can analyze and index books in thirty or more
26. languages.

(more)

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1. After World War II the library carried out a mass disposal of
2. duplicate material, shipping out as many as 15,000 items a
3. month to other institutions. The action aided war-devastated
4. libraries in many countries and enabled numerous other institu-
5. tions abroad to start badly needed collections of medical
6. literature.

7. As a side line, the library prepares exhibits of medicine,
8. past and present, for display in the nearby Smithsonian Institu-
9. tion, a government-sponsored organization which encourages
10. learning and research. Thousands of tourists see these dis-
11. plays. The library also prepares exhibits for conventions of
12. physicians and other scientists. One recent display at a
13. gathering in Princeton, New Jersey, was entitled "Development of
14. Russian Neurophysiology." It featured the work of Doctors E.M.
15. Sechenov, I.P. Pavlov, and other specialists in this field.

16. The move to the grounds of the National Institutes of Health
17. will place the library in a world medical center where hundreds
18. of scientists from more than thirty countries have worked with
19. American colleagues in various branches of research. To visiting
20. and American scientists alike the library will offer more
21. efficient service than was possible in the past. The new
22. building will house the Cleveland collection as well as the
23. one in Washington. It will have a big main reading room, ade-
24. quate space for exhibitions, and facilities for speeding up the
25. photographic, mailing, and other jobs.

26. "Successive librarians have been dreaming of a building like

1. this for forty years," said Dr. Rogers. "And not only dreaming,
2. but working for its realization. We think these new quarters
3. will be just about ideal for most of the library's operations
4. for a century to come.

5. "Naturally we're excited about it. We like to think of the
6. library as a storehouse of medical knowledge. And with the help
7. of great libraries in other lands we hope to make it an in-
8. creasingly abundant source of enlightenment for men and women
9. everywhere who devote unselfish lives to treating the bodily
10. ailments of mankind."

CAPTIONS

